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Annual Report | 2019

Image by João Pombeiro (CC BY).

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Creative Commons Annual Report | 2019

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Bulding a Vibrant, Collaborative Global Commons

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Message from the Board Chair

2019 was another thrilling year for Creative Commons, and for the sharing of knowledge and creativity at the heart of our mission.

We produced our biggest-ever CC Global Summit community event and organized a major celebration of the public domain in collaboration with our friends at the Internet Archive.

We launched a global scholarship initiative for our CC Certificate educational program, helping a diverse group of sharing enthusiasts become sharing experts and ambassadors.

We continued our work with major cultural institutions to help them unlock knowledge and creativity by making works in their collections openly available to all.

And we launched CC Search and developed other tools to make it easier than ever for people to both publish and discover openly-licensed material.

Please read our 2019 annual report for details about this work, plus much more.

Thank you to all of CC's supporters and community members who make what we do possible.

Molly Shaffer Van Houweling
Board Chair, Creative Commons

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Our Mission

Creative Commons (CC) is the world's leading nonprofit organization removing the legal and technical obstacles to sharing knowledge and creativity in order to help society overcome its most pressing challenges, from climate change to health emergencies. For nearly two decades, CC has been removing obstacles to sharing through our open licenses and public domain tools, as well as advocacy for copyright reform and open policies.

Today, we work on a variety of projects and initiatives that fall under four broad programs:

- **Unlocking Knowledge**
- **Community and Outreach**
- **Discovery**
- **Policy**

Community Spotlight

Is It Possible to Decolonize the Commons? An Interview With Jane Anderson of Local Contexts

Read the interview

"...the circulation of knowledge and culture depends upon relationships and context—and if these relationships are formed unevenly, or privilege one cultural perspective above another, then that inequity continues to create a range of future problems...[imagine a commons] that has an informed and engaged approach to openness; one that foregrounds the histories and exclusions embedded within calls for openness and open access."

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Our Highlights

Throughout 2019, we not only strengthened our existing efforts across our four programs, but also expanded them in response to the needs of our community and the changing nature of the internet and copyright. In particular, we:

- **Launched CC Search**, our easy-to-use platform that enables anyone to search for and find openly licensed and public domain images
- **Organized the biggest CC Global Summit ever**, with more than 400 participants gathering in Lisbon, Portugal from over 60 countries
- **Provided our first set of scholarships** for the CC Certificate
- **Launched the CC Global Network Platforms**, which include Open Education, Copyright Reform, and Open GLAM
- **Supported the Cleveland Museum of Art** as they released over 30,000 high quality, free and open digital images from the museum's collection under CC0
- **Co-hosted a celebration of the reopening of the public domain** in the United States with the Internet Archive
- **Helped draft and pass the UNESCO OER Recommendation**, an official instrument that helps governments support open education in their countries
- **Updated the CC License Chooser** to make it even easier for creators to choose which CC license to use when publishing their work
- **Collaborated with the European Commission** to publish translations of the CC License Suite Version 4.0 in all 24 official languages of the European Union
- **Translated the CC licenses and public domain tools** into languages that serve more than a billion persons, including Standard and Simplified Chinese, Korean, and Czech

Unlocking Knowledge

To help realize the potential of sharing knowledge and creativity to solve some of our most pressing challenges, CC has been removing legal and technical obstacles to sharing both online and offline since 2001, creating the keys used to unlock works around the world. In 2019, this work continued through two primary areas: CC License Suite and Public Domain Tools, and Guidance and Translations.

CC License Suite and Public Domain Tools

The CC License Suite gives individuals and organizations a simple, standardized way to grant copyright permissions for creative and academic works; ensure proper attribution; and allow others to copy, distribute, and make use of those works. Our public domain tools enable copyright owners to dedicate their works to the worldwide public domain and facilitate the labeling and discovery of works that are already free of known copyright restrictions. So far, there are nearly 2 billion CC-licensed works online—all of them are available to anyone in the world to use, or adapt and build upon.

Images from Self Magazine's "Vaccines Save Lives" campaign, shot with photographer Heather Hazzan, SELF (CC BY).

"There are nearly 2 billion CC-licensed works online..."

In 2019, we continued to work on the CC Legal Database, expanding on the existing Case Law Database. This community-sourced database compiles legal decisions involving CC licenses, as well as legal scholarship about CC licenses and the legal ecosystem in which they operate. Thanks to work by our 2019 Google Summer of Code (GSoC) participants, part of the CC Open Source program, we also released an updated CC Wordpress Plugin and an updated beta version of the CC License Chooser!

Guidance and Translations

In order to ensure CC licenses are used and implemented correctly, we engage with governments and institutions who are adopting the tools and/or reusing CC-licensed work. For example, in 2019 we continued our work with the MIT Open Access Task Force in its development of the next generation of university open access policy and provided recommendations on how best to accomplish their goals. We also engaged with creative outlets, including Self Magazine on their vaccine awareness campaign with the American Academy of Pediatrics. At the end of 2019, we were pleased to help support the Global Environment Reporting Collective on their latest project: The Pangolin Reports, a series of investigative reports released under CC BY-NC-ND documenting the poaching and smuggling of pangolins.

Another important component of our legal work is the translation of the license deeds and other resources. In 2019, we published translations of Version 4.0 of the CC License Suite into Chinese (traditional), Chinese (simplified), Korean, Czech, and Slovenian; as well as Creative Commons Zero (CC0) into Spanish. Following the European Commission's decision to adopt CC BY 4.0 and CC0 for all its content and data in 2019, we began collaborating with them to publish translations in all 24 official languages of the European Union. In total, the accessibility of our licenses and public domain tools to persons in their first language increased by over a billion users.

Community Spotlight

The Freedom to Listen: Rute Correia on the Power of Community Radio

Read the interview

"What I find really exciting about open music is that there's so much to discover and everything is accessible. Cultural industries tend to remain heavily closed, reinforcing the idea that culture is a privilege, but CC licenses challenge that and allow you to share your stuff with whoever you want."

Community and Outreach

To effectively remove the legal and technical obstacles to sharing, we steward and support a global community of people and organizations who use and actively support CC licenses and tools. In 2019, we focused heavily on four community and outreach initiatives: the CC Global Network, the CC Global Summit, the CC Certificate, and CC Open Source.

CC Global Network

The CC Global Network (CCGN) is an exciting and dynamic aspect of CC's global work. It's the home for a global community who share CC's vision and values, and is constantly expanding with new members, projects, and CC Country Chapters. In 2019, we proudly increased the number of CC Country Chapters to 42 and the individual and institutional membership to 504; expanding our reach to 72 countries! We also celebrated several different achievements, including:

Participants at the 2019 CC Global Summit pose together in Lisbon, Portugal. Photo by Sebastiaan van ter Burg (CC BY).

- Electing nine members to the first Executive Committee for the CCGN Council
- Launching the CCGN Platforms, which include Open Education, Copyright Reform, and Open GLAM
- Shipping a revamped version of the CC Network Website, with a comprehensive introductory toolkit for new CC Country Chapters as they begin their advocacy work

CC Global Summit

In order to engage with the broader open community of individuals and institutions advocating for open access and embarking on open initiatives, we steward the CC Global Summit. Led by the community volunteers through the CC Summit program committee, this annual gathering brings together hundreds of people to discuss issues related to education, policy, culture, science, copyright, and more.

Held over three days in Lisbon and hosted by CC Portugal, the 2019 CC Global Summit was bigger than ever with more than 400 participants from across the world bringing insights and stories from hundreds of local contexts. The keynotes alone featured insights from three continents and a variety of disciplines, from Majd al-Shihabi's work on decolonizing archives in Palestine to Sophie Bloeman's vision of a shared digital Europe. We were also proud to have provided scholarships to 150 recipients from 59 countries! In total, the event featured:

- Seven keynotes
- 140+ individual sessions
- 200+ presenters
- 400+ participants
- Eight art exhibits
- Six DJs/performance artists
- Two visual artists
- Two evening events

"More than 400 participants from across the world..."

CC Certificate

To help our community realize the potential of open policies and open licensing, we launched the CC Certificate in 2018, through which we offer training in copyright, open licensing, the public domain, and more. The CC Certificate is CC's first self-funded program, and throughout 2019 we actively worked to make the program more impactful by recruiting and training seven new facilitators, registering 398 participants, translating content into Italian and Arabic, and providing our first set of scholarships to 10 recipients. All of the Certificate content is also CC BY licensed OER.

We were also excited to find that 71.5% of alumni polled in 2019 indicated they use the knowledge they gained from the course on a weekly basis and 62% indicated that they are consulted by colleagues as an open licensing expert! Perhaps our biggest achievement of 2019 was publishing Creative Commons for Educators and Librarians, a print companion to the CC Certificate. This free book was developed in collaboration with the American Library Association (ALA) and is licensed CC BY!

CC Open Source

In 2019, we officially launched CC Open Source, an initiative that enables members of the open community to contribute to the 20+ technical projects that CC maintains. This initiative provides structure and clear recognition to community contributors, including efforts by 15 external developers to help build CC Search and the CC Catalog API, and many more who submitted bugs and feature requests on GitHub.

To house all of these efforts, we built the CC Open Source website which gives developers the opportunity to learn about CC's technical projects and how they can contribute. The website also features CC's technical blog, where we published 42 blog posts written by both CC team members and community members on technical topics, like backend architecture and data visualization. We also welcomed five interns in 2019 via Google Summer of Code (GSoC) and three interns via Outreachy. Thanks to their efforts, we were able to launch a new CC Search browser extension, an updated WordPress plugin, a new license chooser, the Linked Commons data visualization based on CC Catalog data, and Vocabulary, a design system for all CC web properties.

Discovery

There are nearly 2 billion CC-licensed works across the web—but it's not enough that these works exist. In order for them to be useful, people need to be able to discover them. To face this challenge, we launched CC Search in April 2019. This easy-to-use platform enables anyone to search for and find openly licensed and public domain images from around the web in one place. Its launch was covered by many news sites, such as TechCrunch, PetaPixel, Neatorama, Campus Technology, and more. It was also one of the top posts on Hacker News.

"The CC Search platform displays over 500 million images..."

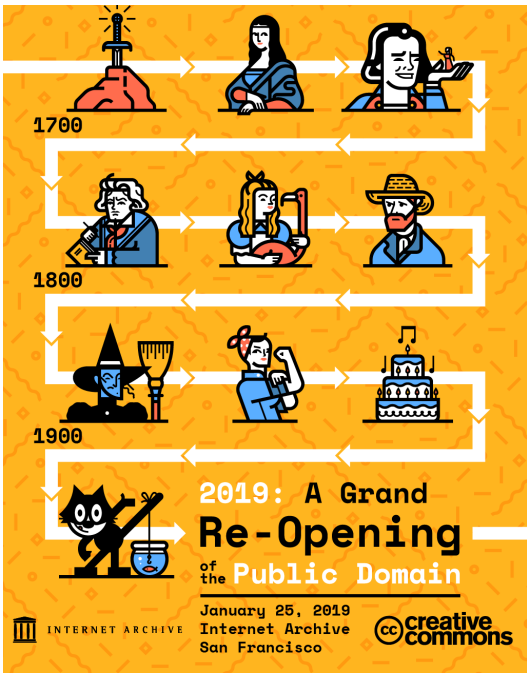
In 2019, CC Search was used by over 2.9 million people across 230 countries and territories. Built on top of the CC Catalog, where data on openly licensed works is stored, the CC Search platform displays over 500 million images from museums, like the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Rijksmuseum, as well as Wikimedia Commons, Flickr, and DeviantArt. In May 2019, the MHz Foundation announced Curationist, the first external product built using the CC Catalog API. At the end of 2019, we were pleased to receive $100,000 in unrestricted financial support and $25,000 in promotional credits from Amazon Web Services, as well as training, marketing, and technical support to improve CC Search and the CC Catalog API through image recognition and machine learning.

Policy

While the CC licenses have proven successful in unlocking creativity and knowledge globally, they're not enough to solve many of the unnecessary obstacles to sharing embedded in the copyright system—the regulatory framework that shapes how the world shares creative content. This is why we work closely with governments and institutions around the world to support them in unlocking their works through Open Education Policy, Copyright Policy, and Open GLAM Policy.

Open Education

In 2019, we made notable progress towards building and implementing open education policies globally, from creating an Open Education Policy with the Global Learning xPrize to working with USAID and the Global Reading Network to write and co-publish "Open Licensing of Primary Grade Reading Materials: Considerations and Recommendations." As a part of the drafting committee, we are particularly proud of the adoption of the Recommendation on OER by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in November by 193 member states. This Recommendation marks an important milestone for CC, as we spent over a decade advocating for open education with UNESCO, the Commonwealth of Learning, and multiple national government and institutional partners.



The poster celebrating the re-opening of the public domain by Comunas Unidas (CC0).

All of these achievements are due in part to the success of the Open Education Platform, which grew to include 977 platform members from across more than 74 countries in 2019. This Platform is a hub of activity for open education advocates and practitioners to identify, plan, and coordinate multi-national open education content, practices, and policy activities.

Copyright

CC regularly engages in copyright reform debates by issuing statements and/or submitting official comments on proposed legislation and policies. For example, in early 2019 we signed an open letter to the European Commission, alongside Communia and over 40 other organizations, calling

for an inclusive stakeholder dialogue that would incorporate the views of human rights, digital rights, and access to knowledge organisations. We also made statements regarding the European Union's proposed Directive on Copyright in the Digital Single Market and on the Canadian Parliament's Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology (INDU) report.

"2019 was a big year for the public domain..."

2019 was also a big year for the public domain—it was the first year that published works entered the public domain due to copyright expiration since the U.S. Copyright Term Extension Act in 1998. For the first time in 20 years, tens of thousands of books, films, visual art, sheet music, and plays published in 1923 were free for anyone to use. We were also pleased that on March 28, 2019 the European Commission (EC) announced it had adopted CC BY 4.0 to share its published documents, including photos, videos, reports, and peer-reviewed studies. In addition to the use of CC BY, the EC also adopted the CC0 Public Domain Dedication to publish works directly in the global public domain. This was an important mark of progress in the fight to ensure that publicly funded works are openly licensed and accessible to the public.

Open GLAM

Throughout 2019, we increased our efforts in open GLAM (galleries, libraries, archives, and museums), beginning the year with the announcement that the Cleveland Museum of Art released over 30,000 high quality, free and open digital images from the museum's collection under CC0 and made them available via their application programming interface (API). We also stewarded a "temperature check" survey on the OpenGLAM Principles—a set of principles created in 2013 to define what it means to be an "open institution." In response to trends occurring in the GLAM space regarding the digitization of public domain works, we released a public statement in November arguing that reproductions of public domain works should remain in the public domain. That statement received over 10,000 views within one month, sparking an important conversation among experts in open GLAM and copyright.

This digital image of Claude Monet's "Water Lilies (Agapanthus)" is in the public domain (CC0), along with 30,000 other images, thanks to the Cleveland Museum of Art's Open Access program.

We also participated in the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) Standing Committee on Copyright and Related Rights to promote broad exceptions and limitations for museums and other guardians of cultural heritage, and limiting the scope of any new broadcasting rights. Finally, we ended the year preparing for the Smithsonian Open Access Initiative (officially launched in February 2020) releasing 2.8 million images and data into the public domain using CC0. This project is the culmination of years of collaborative work with the Smithsonian on its open access policy by members of the Creative Commons team, including our General Counsel Diane Peters, Director of Open Education Cable Green, and CC GLAM platform lead Evelin Heidel.

Our Collaborations

An important part of our work is collaborating with other organizations on initiatives and projects that support the open movement. At the beginning of 2019, we welcomed the first Bassel Khartabil Fellowship recipient, Majd Al-shihabi, a Palestinian-Syrian engineer and urban planning graduate based in Lebanon. During the course of the year and with the support of the fellowship grant, Majd developed the Palestine Open Maps initiative and the Masrad platform for archiving oral history. For the 2020 year, we transferred the Fellowship to the Fabricatorz Foundation, led by Bassel's friends Barry Threw and Jon Phillips.

In March 2019, we were selected as part of the 2018-2019 cohort of Mozilla Fellows host institutions, and after a call for applications, we selected New Zealand-based open source activist and artist Sam Muirhead. During the fellowship, Muirhead examined the possibilities of utilizing open source practices in the design and animation process by sharing project files under CC licenses. He hosted "Cut, Copy & Paste" remix workshops at a range of events, from the Mozilla Festival to the CC Global Summit. Finally, in September we announced our collaboration with Coil and Mozilla on a $100 million fund to benefit creators and promote innovation in web monetization, called Grant for the Web. As a part of this collaboration, we serve on the Advisory Council and Technical Advisory Group which help review incoming grant applications.

The image on the right is a snapshot from the Palestine Open Maps initiative developed by Bassel Khartabil Fellowship recipient Majd Al-shihabi.

Community Spotlight

Openness, Mapping, Democracy, and Reclaiming Narrative: Majd Al-shihabi in conversation

Read the interview

"...the tool to accomplish our goal, which is having democratic representation of ourselves, is openness, with all of its permutations. There's an idiom in English: sunlight is the best disinfectant. So the more open that we are, the more capable we are at disinfecting our region from the corruption that is very deeply situated in it."

Our Financials

Expenses in 2019 (USD)

Administration	977,397
Culture, Communications, Platform Support	448,972
Education	433,310
Fundraising	400,936
International/Affiliates	448,410
Legal	285,872
Technology	1,264,204

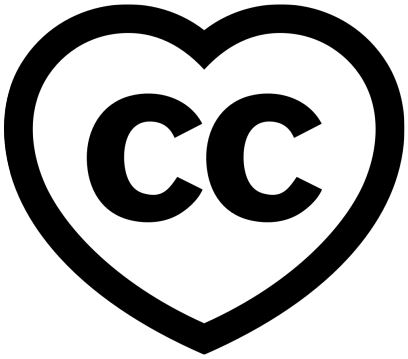
Income in 2019 (USD)

CC Certificate Income	223,090
Corporations	625,900
Foundations	1,877,000
Global Summit Income	42,244
Individual	166,244
In-kind Donations	45,425

Our Supporters

Creative Commons is generously supported by individual donors, foundations, and corporations who share our commitment to open knowledge and creativity. We gratefully acknowledge past and present supporters, including:

- William and Flora Hewlett Foundation
- Arcadia Fund
- Private Internet Access
- MHz Foundation
- Alexander MacGillivray
- The Elkes Family Foundation
- Mozilla Foundation
- Holger Kienle
- Schwab Charitable Fund
- Brewster Kahle and Mary Austin
- Flickr
- SKL Family Foundation
- Douglas Jaffe
- Zahavah Levine
- George Stapleton



Interested in becoming a CC Supporter? Please contact our Director of Development Jami Vass at jami@creativecommons.org, or donate here. Thank you!

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Image by João Pombeiro (CC BY).

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